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U.S. Ties to Anti-Sandinists Are Reported to Be Extensive

The following article is based on reporting by Philip Taubman and Raymond Bonner and was written by Mr. Bonner.

WASHINGTON, April 2 — A Honduran who was directly involved in planning American covert activities reports that the United States has been giving intelligence assistance and military advice in Honduras to forces fighting the Sandinist Government in Nicaragua.

According to this Honduran, the United States was extensively involved in training and arming the paramilitary forces before they recently entered Nicaragua from Honduras.

The information supplied by the Honduran in a series of interviews over the last few days was confirmed in large measure by two senators on the Senate Intelligence Committee and a highly placed Reagan Administration official.

In its detail, the information supplied by the Honduran suggests a mosaic of American covert activities that Administration officials acknowledge is apparently having the effect of supporting the current insurgency in Nicaragua. The political and military leaders of the anti-Sandinist forces have openly vowed to overthrow the Government.

Administration officials say, however, that the United States' objective in Nicaragua is to harass, not overthrow, the Government. A law passed by Congress last year prohibits United States support of efforts to topple the Sandinist Government.

Administration officials say the United States' involvement does not mark a shift in policy, and they maintain that the support for the anti-Sandinist forces, although increasing, remains consistent with the original intention of blocking arms shipments from Nicaragua to guerrillas in El Salvador.

The conflicting descriptions of the purpose of the American involvement may reflect the difficulty inherent in trying to manage foreign paramilitary forces in a highly volatile region.

Several senators on the Senate Intelligence Committee, reporting that their colleagues had grown increasingly uneasy in recent weeks about the American role in Honduras and Nicaragua, said the Central Intelligence Agency had overestimated its ability to control the anti-Sandinist forces. As a result, they said, it appeared to have been drawn into underwriting more ambitious operations than it intended.

The Honduran informant has close ties to the Honduran military as well as American diplomatic and military officials in Tegucigalpa and was directly involved in joint military planning until early this year. He said that to his knowledge no Americans were operating inside Nicaragua with the insurgents. He described these covert American activities:

¶Providing frequent intelligence reports to the insurgent forces about the movement of Nicaraguan Government soldiers as well as the location of Nicaraguan tanks and artillery.

¶Training and arming the paramilitary forces, including the shipment of plane loads of arms and ammunitions in August 1982 to Mosquito Indian units in eastern Honduras. More than 50 United States military advisers, most of whom were of Hispanic background and did not dress in uniforms, trained paramilitary units in Honduras last year. The C.I.A. and the Pentagon refused to comment on these matters.

¶Providing underwater equipment and explosives to Argentine-trained sabotage teams that were infiltrated into Nicaragua earlier this year and blew up port installations in Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua. The C.I.A. and the Defense Department declined to comment.

The Honduran source said the intelligence reports are based in part on information collected by planes manned by United States Air Force personnel that make regular reconnaissance flights along the Nicaraguan-Honduran border as part of an intelligence-gathering operation with the code name Royal Duke.

The reports are given to the Honduran military with the understanding that they will be shared with the commanders of the paramilitary forces, he said. The C.I.A. and the Defense Department refused to comment on the Air Force operation or other intelligence-gathering efforts.

'The Pretension Is Over'

The activities described by the Honduran source would indicate a far deeper level of American involvement in the Nicaraguan conflict than the Reagan Administration has publicly acknowledged. The Administration, while refusing to deny a covert American role in the fighting, has portrayed the conflict in Nicaragua as a factional dispute between different elements of the coalition that seized power from Gen. Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979.

The Honduran informant said the "real objective" of the operation in Nicaragua "is to overthrow" the Sandinists. He added that "the pretension is over" that the United States was interested only in harassing the Sandinist Government.

Although he is troubled by the Marxist orientation of the Sandinists, he said, he is more concerned that the current hostilities in Nicaragua may expand into a war between Honduras and Nicaragua.

The Honduran said the United States Ambassador to Honduras, John D. Negroponte, and the chief of the Honduran military, Gen. Gustavo Adolfo Alvarez Martinez, were "the brains behind the operation."

"They were, and they still are," the informant said, referring to the role the two men played during the planning of the operation and its execution. He said the two met daily to discuss the progress of the war, including strategy. Mr. Negroponte has refused to comment on such reports.

Three Command Centers

The Honduran said the operation was being directed from three command centers. He said the rebels' command center was in the southern part of Honduras, and two or three liaison officers from the Honduran military were assigned there. The Honduran military high command directs the operation from its regular headquarters in Tegucigalpa and the United States participation is directed out of the American Embassy, he said.

The three-tier system is apparently part of an effort by the American mis-

sion in Honduras to remain insulated from direct contact with the anti-Sandinist forces now that the irregular troops are operating in Nicaragua. C.I.A. officials have cited the system to Congress as an example of how the agency has organized its operations to remain in compliance with the law, according to two members of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

According to the Honduran informant, the United States is most active in gathering intelligence information about activities inside Nicaragua. He said the United States was supplying the Hondurans with surveillance photographs, tapes of intercepted communications between Nicaraguan leaders, and other raw intelligence information.

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